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Schemmer, Janine

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“We Are in the Museum Now”

Narrating and Representing Dock Work

Janine Schemmer

Dock work underwent a major shift since the implementation of the container and its consequences like automation and logistics. Since the 1960s, global developments have had a major impact on work structures and organisational patterns of workers and employees. This development engendered generational conflicts through structural transformations, job losses and hierarchical labour disputes. Furthermore, the changing character of dock work altered ideas and concepts of masculinity connected to the profession, challenging a traditional sense of male workers’ pride and evoking existential issues.

Although transformations in ports follow global logics and are subject to similar processes, the history of each workplace and its actors is always linked to a local context. While, in some former port cities, dock work merely plays a marginal role today, others have been able to maintain their status as an important reloading point. Hamburg is particularly suited to an analysis of this technical transformation as the port still plays a major role in the city’s economy and public image (cf. Rodenstein 2008). Moreover, inhabitants and dock workers alike identify with the place up to the present day.

As complex spaces of work and cultural encounters, ports are natural candidates not only for an analysis of spatial transformations, of changes in employment patterns and work cultures. Since the disappearance of former working practices and the historicising of port areas took place as a simultaneous process (cf. Berking/Schwenk 2011), harbours and docks are good examples regarding the challenges of historic representations and the museumification of labour. After losing its status as a freeport zone in 2003, various enterprises, such as advertising agencies, entertainment industries and the wider creative sector, began to settle in and around the *Speicherstadt*, the central part of the former port area. This district today is re-enacted as a cultural event space. Right next to it the so-called *HafenCity* is emerging, a huge restructuring project. Characteristic features of the old port and its related patterns of work maintain their presence in the form of warehouses and historical cranes and function as the backdrop for this development. Andreas Reckwitz describes this process as “self-culturalisation” (Reckwitz 2009: 2) and explains the transformation of Western urbanity since the 1970s with the creation of culture-orientated creative cities. He points out that this phenomenon is not only a discursive one, but also influences and changes social practices and the materiality of the architecture of a city, of residential or entertainment areas or business districts. The *HafenCity* is only one expression of this transformed materiality. Besides, various former docks have been filled up in order to store containers there, and container terminals and new working areas have been located outside the centre in the

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western and southern part of the city. Besides an increasing event culture, Reckwitz also observes a trend of museumification, a development that occurred in Hamburg as a parallel process to the rising mechanisation of labour. Since the 1980s, various old ships have been converted to museums and are now part of the maritime heritage ensemble and the city's public image. One institution that documents and represents this transformation process as well as the historic occupational traditions is the *Hafenmuseum* (Harbour Museum). As last witnesses of the old port and as protagonists and active part of the transformation, a group of unionised men raised the idea of a museum in the mid-1980s. It eventually opened its doors in 2005 as a branch of the *Museum der Arbeit* (Museum of Work).

While the global success story of the container and the revolutionary changes it brought about in the logistics sector are well known and researched (e.g. Levinson 2006), my research focuses on the perceptions of those who observed and experienced these transformations and on the socio-cultural and spatial implications the changes entailed (Schemmer 2018).[1] In this article, I will report some of my central findings. When working in the Harbour Museum as a student, I established first contacts with some future interview partners, while I got to know the others in different contexts. Overall, I collected 25 interviews with former Hamburg dock workers, with the term referring to protagonists occupied in the wide range of cargo handling. As narratives always represent a retrospective view on an experience and "stories are told from their end" (Lehmann 2007: 284), the narratives I gathered, along with some interviewees' present engagement in the museum and other heritage sites, predominantly reflect their current views on the harbour complex and its changes.[2] Considering a narrative a cultural practice means to look closely at the processuality that constitutes meaning in retrospect, and to identify the different functions of retrospective narratives (cf. Bendix 1996: 170). My interest lies in the perceptions and self-positioning of former dockers, discursive patterns of their narrations, and the meaning they attribute to their former workplace in relation to present developments. In the following, I will outline central topics brought up by the interviewees regarding the transformation of the port, in particular with respect to the mechanisation of dock work and the social and spatial changes this process triggered. As the place where these memories are located and publicly negotiated today is the Harbour Museum, I will first turn to this institution.

Moving Display Cases – Negotiating Dock Work

The Harbour Museum is situated in *Schuppen 50*, one of the last historic, heritage-protected quay sheds built between 1908 and 1912. Notwithstanding its historic setting, the shed is located within the contemporary working port, close to the container terminals. This proximity makes the museum an interesting place for research as it marks an intersection between work related memories of the former dockers and the transformations the port has visibly undergone over the last decades. Although the municipality

1 It must be noted that most protagonists in my study have internalised the port's history and firmly identify with it until today. As my analysis focuses specifically on cargo handling, where women were not employed, I rarely interviewed female protagonists. In addition, the voices of those who are not part of this narrative community for various reasons, such as the countless workers who lost their jobs or just worked in the port briefly, must be left out.

2 All cited quotes are translated from German into English by the author.

runs the museum, there are only few permanent employees and it is mostly based on voluntary work. Apart from the directorate, the main protagonists on site are volunteers and former dock workers, shipbuilding workers and seamen.

Outside the building, museum ships and old cranes are aligned along the quay. Inside, the hall seems more like a storage than a museum. There are many shelves filled with objects like tea chests, coffee bags and other goods, along with different working devices, demonstrating the former work routines. Besides, the exhibition also tells the story of the container as the principle motor of modern port infrastructure. The museum follows a hands-on approach, encouraging the visitors to touch and interact with the exhibited objects in order to literally grasp and comprehend the technological transformation. Rather than explicitly addressing the social dimensions of dock work, the museum's focus primarily lies on the material culture of traditional dock work and on related professional skills. Some volunteers are still busy collecting objects that are being displayed in the exhibition and to some extent they also co-design the way in which the exhibits are presented. Since only few text panels contextualise working tools and objects, the volunteers' memories and assessments constitute a key feature of the exhibition.

Such co-curatorial attempts, however, can lead to moments of competition between "professional" curators and varying groups of voluntary workers. In particular, this can be noted by looking at a number of display cases, which formed a central part of the exhibition concept in the first years of the museum. The handling and design of these cases exemplifies the symbolic value of objects for the manifestation and representation of former professional positions and hierarchies (cf. Korff 1999: 278). The museum management and the volunteers planned and equipped their content in close cooperation. Inside the display cases, formerly established work structures are explained. During the first few months of my work at the museum, I noticed that the arrangement of these display cases in the showroom changed on a regular, often even daily basis. The display cases sometimes literally migrated to other places and positions within the exhibition, as different actors felt responsible for their organisation. Each of them belonged to various occupational groups: some working on land, some on ships, some working in the processes of cargo handling, processing or control. Thus, the heterogeneous protagonists had different perspectives with regard to the occupational context which they saw represented in the composition and location of the display cases. After being moved by the former workers and employees, they were often pushed back to their initial positions by the museum management. This movement illustrates the manifold perspectives on the organisation of work and the contradictory views of volunteers, for whom the showcases were symbolic of their former heterogeneous occupations and hierarchical functions.

This animated practice of exhibiting dock work does not only demonstrate a certain wilfulness, self-esteem and *Eigensinn* (Lüdtke 1993) among the actors, but also emphasises ongoing processes of negotiation in presenting histories and the various occupations. Markus Tauschek states that "logics of competition [...] are embedded in the self-interpretations of subjects" (Tauschek 2013: 12). The movement of museum cases and objects can be interpreted as an expression of the conflicts among the occupational groups who felt represented in an inappropriate way or location. The volunteers negotiate their own past; however, former hierarchies continue to be expressed and are played out in contested representations.

Professional hierarchies, depending on individual careers and services for certain companies, continue to consolidate status and habitus. The analysis of both the volunteer narratives and the museum's exhibition practices illustrate that "work defines status" (Eckert 2010: 170). Anton Ermer, for example, a former authorised representative, continues to demonstrate his superiority against a former representative of the work council when he describes his role in a company takeover: "they went bankrupt then, although Mr. A. does not want to admit that [...] we called the shots, we were the managers" (Ermer 2010: 13). He demonstrates the right decision he took back then by emphasising his position. Until today, he continues to discuss the successes and mistakes of past business transactions with the former workers' representative, whom he mentions and who, like Ermer, is involved in the museum, always holding on to the old hierarchical matrix. Even if they cooperate for the museum today, interact as colleagues and show great respect for each other, the competition over interpretations of past actions continues and occurs, above all, between different professional groups and members of different companies.

In this light, the moving of display cases and the way knowledge is communicated in the museum can be understood as a performative "act of presentation" (Löffler 1999: 76). According to Ina-Maria Greverus, performance means not only considering the contents of the narrative, but also incorporating the context of what has been said:

> *Performance is the staging of a situation of interaction and communication in which a cultural text is produced. In order to understand this text, everyone involved must be able to co-create and read it – this does not exclude that the text is interpreted in different ways (Greverus 1997: 89).*

Analysing the various, and partly conflicting, narratives further exemplifies the particular connection between taking action and speaking.

Silent Revolution? Technical and Social Transformations

In May 1987, an article titled "The Silent Revolution" was printed in the local newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt*. It appeared within the context of the 798th port anniversary, which is celebrated extensively each year. The author explained the contemporary development of containerisation to the broad public. Whereas, in earlier days, the port would seem more crowded to spectators, the author of the article assured the worried reader that despite container and computer, there were still a lot of jobs in the port; only their profile had changed and more workers that are qualified were needed. Finally, he concluded: "Grandpa's port is dead. But the port is alive." With this statement, the author stressed the continuous success of the Hamburg port as a reloading point in contrast, for example, to the decline of the shipbuilding industry at that time. Although the number of workers decreased immensely over the years (in 1968, there were around 15,000 people; in 1978, around 13,000; and in 1994, around 6,000), dock work and the port itself continued to be an important part of Hamburg's economy, both in terms of employment and tourism.

The silent revolution as described in the aforementioned article also emerges in the narrations. My interview partners vividly talk about changes in work procedures and workspaces and the development from teamwork to more individualistic and isolated

workflows. In general, they do not describe these transformations as sudden ruptures but as slow processes. For decades, there had been a coexistence of self-learned practical work knowledge (cf. Hörning 2004) and containerised movement of goods and corresponding parallel work practices, which may be one of the reasons why technological changes are not described as biographical ruptures. Paul Wonner, born in 1950, started working as a stevedore, soon qualified for operating a container gantry, and told me: "We laughed about the container and said, 'that box will never establish itself'. As there were always ships with general cargo, we dismissed the idea that the container would push us aside" (2010: 17). There is a parallel between this statement and contemporary reports of port magazines in which the entrepreneurs tried to appease the workers, and promoted a more comfortable manner of working with the container. Headlines like "Don't be afraid of the container" (GHB 1967: 3) were meant to placate the workers.

The unexpected rise of the container is a common narrative pattern. Although many interviewees commented that they did not think of the container as a particular threat, a closer look at the professional biographies indicates that the protagonists confronted the changes by additional qualification or occupational reorientation as more and more private firms had to close down from the late 1970s onwards. In April 1980, Kai Reuter, born in 1941, for instance, who had been working as a bargeman for 20 years, applied for the position of a ship's master with the river police, as he was pessimistic about the future development of his occupation. But not all of the men perceived and confronted the transformation immediately. Walter Widmann, a former instructor in the traditional occupation of winchman, summed up the situation: "I was vain, I never thought they could remove me from my position!" (2010: 56). He worked for 25 years until his job was terminated in 1994. When the company he worked for decided to keep him busy with custodial activities, a doctor attested him to be unsuitable for the occupation and he received an early pension. After the end of his career, Widmann soon engaged himself voluntarily in the senior groups of the union, his former company, and finally in the museum.

Furthermore, the current estimation and evaluation of the transformation through technical and technological devices like containers and computers varies vastly. While interviewees who belong to the younger generation and intentionally decided to work in the container section from the late 1970s onwards express a clear interest in working with technical equipment, older ones take a negative attitude towards engaging with modern technology in general. This generational gap is not surprising, but it is interesting which aspects of this frame of mind and development are narrated, how they are illustrated, and what is being left out.

Erwin Meier, born in 1949, initially learned the profession bargeman and started as a casual employee in the port. Economic reasons motivated him to acquire technical skills:

> *At that time, I was working on the Burchardkai terminal, where I saw the van carriers. The workers there told me about their income. And then I said, "Boy, you can do this, too!" [...] Now I am allowed to operate everything that moves. (Meier 2010: 19 f.).*

Of course, next to the prospect of an increased income, the technological interest also arose from the fact that young workers still had a career ahead of them.[3] Besides, the container was a new device evoking curiosity, and working with it was uncomplicated in comparison to the transport of tree trunks, for example, as another interviewee states. Ulli Amling, also born in 1949, expressed his great interest in containers. He started to work in the port in the late 1970s as a mechanic. After a few months, he had the possibility to choose which sector he would like to work in and decided on the container section where he saw the future of dock work.

Peter Kramer was born in 1937. In 1951, he began working as a tallyman, a traditional trade that later completely lost its importance. As a tallyman, he was responsible for cargo control and quality. At the very beginning of the interview, he mentions two main themes, which are characteristic throughout his narrative: the interaction and the social aspects of his everyday work routine. He constantly underlines good relations with different colleagues, a fact that ensured his professional standing throughout the transformation process:

> *I got through rather well because I was in great demand by different companies. I never really had problems. […] One colleague always told me: "You are a popular man." Well, for all those years. People knew each other. And everyone knew what the other was able or not able to do. Therefore, I actually never had problems. (Kramer 2010: 1).*

By emphasising twice right in the beginning of our talk that he did not encounter obstacles, he aroused my curiosity and I expected a narrative of loss. Instead, he focused on his professional continuity, which his social networks enabled him. Tallyman was a highly regarded profession. Practical working skills obtained through experience are an important feature in his narrative. Kramer explained he would rather rely on his own mathematical abilities than on a calculator. Through the narrative juxtaposition of body techniques and machine technology, several narrators regain their power to act, which got lost in many operational fields. In the 1990s, the profession became less important through the increasing technology and the subsequent reorganisation and qualification. Kramer explains very clearly:

> *I guess there are no tallymen anymore working for the labour pool. The category doesn't exist anymore because nobody needs them anymore. You have to be able to drive van carriers. You have to drive the container bridge. Those are the people they need nowadays (Kramer 2010: 82 f.).*

Throughout the interview, he constantly relates to recent developments but never connects them to his personal career. Although Kramer experienced the gradual loss of meaning of his profession, he describes his working life as fulfilled as he worked as a tallyman for nearly 40 years. However, he experienced an immense personal disappointment that implicitly colours his narrative when he mentions that in his last working years as a tallyman in the 1990s, he could no longer find work on a regular basis as

3 Here one can add that operators of the gantry crane rank first on the salary scale, cf. Unternehmensverband Hafen Hamburg 1980: 30.

most tallymen tasks had been automated. Nevertheless, he states positively: "I enjoyed having more spare time" (Kramer 2010: 31). In the end, he agreed to an early retirement. He avoids explaining the end of his career in detail, which is a typical feature with many elderly interview partners, who merely mention an accident or another significant incident but avoid outlining it further. Retirement often remains a blank space in the narrations. Today, Peter Kramer is involved as a volunteer on a museum steam ship.

As the example of Kramer shows, attitudes, positions and attributions of meaning correlate closely with negotiation processes of social relationships and networks which are a central narrative pattern about the port as a social space. This social space can be described as a space of action characterised by individual skills and cooperative relations. Overall, the narratives concerning personal careers in the transformation process focus on professional continuity but at the same time reveal major ambivalences (cf. Passerini 1996: 22 f.). The structural changes caused hierarchical shifts and led to a modified, "technical" image of the docker. While they brought along empowerment for the younger, they meant disempowerment for many older protagonists. The interviews reveal a clear "generational bond" of technical interest and understanding (Schröder 2000: 6). Thus, technological transformation strongly influenced dock workers' identifications. Still, most of the interviewees benefited from the structural and professional transformation, which led to better social and financial circumstances for many protagonists and improved their working and living conditions.[4]

Atmosphere and Emotion – Disappearing Practices, People and Places

Narratives about experiences of loss can mainly be identified on an atmospheric and emotional level. In this context, atmospheres can be described as moods, which are expressed both through specific practices and their modifications as well as through the sensually perceived environment in which these practices were carried out. In the narrations, the interviewees especially emphasise the physical and affective effects of work (cf. Schouten 2005: 13). Narratives about atmosphere deal with practices and objects, places and people. It is striking that the interviewees address visual, haptic and olfactory sensory organs in order to describe their former work and its spatial environment. Often, atmospheric attributions relate to perceptions of time and the rhythm of work, as well as to space and spatial mobility, all of which underwent a deep change.

In this context, Ulrich Schwoch stresses the sensual, tangible dimension of traditional fields of activity and work through the direct and constant contact with the goods. Born in 1938, Schwoch worked as a self-employed confectioner in Hamburg for a few years. When one of his colleagues was not able to continue in the confectionary due to health problems and began working on the docks, the two men talked about the better wages the port offered for people who were willing to work hard. In the end, Schwoch decided to leave the bakery. However, money was not the only reason for the occupational change, as he describes dock work as a desire he had felt for a long time:

> *I had always been interested in the port, and I always had the Speicherstadt in mind. My father was a sailor, and afterwards he became a confectioner. And I*

4 A social history study on this development is yet to be accomplished.

> *wanted to become a sailor too. But as I was married, I couldn't go to sea anymore (Schwoch 2010: 11).*

So he began a vocational re-training in 1970, soon qualified for a higher position in product control (*Vormann*) and worked for a company in the *Speicherstadt*. At the beginning of the interview, we looked at a photo album he had made in 1979 on the occasion of the 75th jubilee of his company. It includes numerous pictures he took, showing his workplace in the *Speicherstadt* and his colleagues at work: secretaries in the office (incidentally, some of the few women mentioned throughout most interviews), traditional and modern devices for cargo handling, damaged goods and their treatment. He labelled all pictures with affectionate rhymes he wrote himself about the work they illustrate. He explains in detail all the different movements and processes that were part of his job and emphasises the feeling and instinct you needed to have, the "Fingerspitzengefühl". In between, he always playfully deviates and includes entertaining stories of exotic animals and unexpected items, like a severed hand that was found between the goods. He talks a lot about social contacts and the atmosphere of the workplace and presents his former work routine through sensual perceptions. This does not only demonstrate his ongoing passion for his former work but also his aim to use several well-known images about the workplace in order to capture the listener's attention even more.

The cultural production of this atmosphere and established images can be retraced by looking at local media reports of the past 60 years. In numerous articles, imaginaries of the port and its workers have been reproduced and imaginations created. One early example is the *Hafenkonzert*, the port concert, a local radio show that exists since 1929 and that has been broadcast live from the port and from the ships for many years. The reporters focused on the port, the cargo, the sailors and evoked a romantic wanderlust. Many interviewees told me about this programme. Also local politicians repeatedly emphasised the particularity of working in the port and created a colourful image of the workplace by highlighting its singularity.

While a changing sensual experience is certainly connected to the decline of manual work as well as to the disappearance of actual goods, hidden in the container, many interviewees also refer to the altered topography of the port and the changes of its shape. They implicitly or explicitly refer to the disappearance of important former points of reference. Considering the negotiations of the port as a working environment, a strong reference to its spatial qualities emerges (cf. Göbel/Prinz 2015: 35). Spatial changes are an important category for the workers' self-understanding, who often locate important parts of their narratives in the traditional workspace. Many descriptions address the filling of the old docks and the construction of container terminals, some of them fully automated. The spatial dimension is explicitly formulated or reflected in only a few narrations but has a clear impact on subjective experiences. Formerly working on the docks, on ships, on company sites or on container terminals, many narrators describe the experience of the landscape and the environment in open spaces and in the open air as central to their work experience. Thus, they positively distinguish their workplace from indoor activities. As a result, the port is experienced as a free and open space in the truest sense of the word. The descriptions of goods, of their quality and the required skills to handle them properly point to a significant sense of materiality. The narratives in this context focus on the physical and sensory knowledge and experience, referring

to times when workers still perceived and felt the goods and experienced specific and different working environments.

Furthermore, many interviewees state that the topographic materiality of their professional environment has fundamentally changed since many new workplaces are literally not accessible anymore. On the one hand, this is due to safety regulations designed to prevent accidents on container terminals. On the other hand, the September 11 attacks completely changed the port and brought along an enormous increase in security measures, as one interviewee pointed out:

> *They built fences all around the terminals, there is a lot of security staff and you can only enter the area with certain badges. […] Then you get access because we have the badges needed to enter the terminals where we work. But in earlier days you were free to move around; you could come very close to the ships and watch the work processes. You can't do this anymore. The terminals are really under observation, day and night (Amling 2010: 50).*

Another interview partner's wife complained that you cannot even leave the bus anymore when visiting a container terminal. She expressed her anger about the fact that even former workers are no longer granted access and cannot move around freely in their former working spaces, which today are being perceived as an inapproachable "technosphere" (Erlach 2000: 2).

Whose Heritage? A Provisional Conclusion

In 2015, The Harbour Museum staged the play "Tallymann and Schutenschubser. A Life in the Harbour", organised in cooperation with the Hamburg Ohnsorg Theater, which is known throughout Germany for its performances in Low German vernacular. The protagonists of the play were some of the museum's volunteers, who shared their memories about their traditional professions. Narratives about the shift from unit loads and general cargo to container port were to be experienced in a particularly impressive way. The museum literally became a performative space in which port histories were not only demonstrated and explained but enacted.

The biographies were dramaturgically closely linked with the city's post-war development until the 1970s. The musical framing of the play with an accordion, symbolically connected with past maritime imaginary worlds, provided the perfect soundscape. The play concluded with the statement of a former ships outfitter: "Now the ships are in the museum. And we are here, too." In this quote, the museum manifests itself as a local expression of global transformations of work, transportation, and commerce.

As already became clear in many interviews I conducted, the play manifested that individual as well as collective representations of dock workers are closely interwoven with the development of their local surroundings. Besides, the performance confirmed that the museum became an important part of the event space mentioned in the beginning of the present article. This staging demonstrates that heritage literally "can be a theatre of memory where active, complex and nuanced representations of working-class life have contemporary resonance" (Smith/Shackel/Campbell 2011: 3). However, it is important to keep in mind that only those who succeeded in the port are taking part in this process in Hamburg. Furthermore, many of those representing the transformation

mainly focus on individual careers and structural developments. The involvement in museum projects as well as in my empirical study demonstrates a self-understanding of an "individual relevance as a source" (Götz 2001: 21). Many protagonists are conscious producers of their own history. Important topics that are not (yet) part of the dominant memory discourse of dock work and dock culture such as strikes, colleagues who lost their jobs, women and migrant workers are mentioned at best, but rarely expanded. Still, the museum offers a space in which the actors can use their agencies within the processes of urban development and self-culturalisation of the city. As observers and active protagonists of the change, it is important for the volunteers and interview partners to have a voice in this process.

And yet, the Harbour Museum is far more than a nostalgic place of remembrance for a few. In their work on site, the volunteers also explain problematic developments and draw connections to the way in which dock work is currently organised. The museum is a symbolic space of action for the former workers and employees, where they have the opportunity to pass on their knowledge and find satisfaction in a field of activity from which they are effectively retired (cf. Jannelli 2012: 83). Many interviewees refer to the museum as an important social anchor, as a reference point where their former professions gain recognition and where they have the opportunity to represent and re-experience part of their own histories. Furthermore, both the interview narratives and the exhibition show that loss of tradition and belief in progress are not negotiated in contrast or interpreted simply as either positive or negative. On the contrary, many interviewees explicate the interdependencies and shed light on the complexities of the transformations reflecting in their own biographies, and focus on the processuality and dynamics of these changes. Thus, stories about technical change go beyond mere narrations about individual working lives but are part of a wider negotiation of the history of dock work. And the Harbour Museum is one place where this process is currently visible.

Different kinds of economic and political processes generate different kinds of memories. This becomes apparent not only by looking at the transformation of work structures and spaces but also by analysing the formation of memory and the representation of work. The ways in which such representational debates are played out are again under review today, as new plans for the Harbour Museum are in the pipeline. In November 2015, the Budget Committee of the German Bundestag approved 120 million euros for the planning and construction of a new German Harbour Museum in Hamburg. Thus, issues of content and images, of tangible and intangible heritage are raised anew. This also involves the future role of former dock workers as active voices, at a time when experts from various disciplines are increasingly becoming involved in the reconstruction and re-telling of the port's history. Existing perspectives, positions and scopes of action are currently being explored afresh. Thomas Overdick (2010) names three challenges for maritime museums that matter in this context: first, finding new ways to tell old stories to a new audience; second, connecting the past with the present in order to emphasise the relevance of a topic; and third, telling new, unheard stories. City museums can play an important role in current debates on social transformations and future urban development. Therefore, it would be important to take up polyphonic perspectives, mirror the complex developments in ports, and point out the diverse working conditions and the technical as well as social realities and their political

and cultural influences. It will be interesting to follow this process and its dynamics in the years to come.

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INTERVIEWS

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(all conducted by Janine Schemmer)

Abstract

Global developments like the introduction of the container since the 1960s strongly influenced work structures and spaces of action for dock workers. This article looks at the experiences of these workers and their positioning within this process. It presents some central findings of my PhD dissertation, an empirical study analysing the narrations of former Hamburg dock workers about spatial and socio-cultural transformations.

Only a few years after the arrival of the container in Hamburg, skilled professions replaced traditional ones in order to secure container handling. These structural transformations led to better social and financial conditions of those able to continue their work and resulted in changed self-images of those pursuing a career. Besides the technical transformation, a parallel process of musealisation of dock work took place, documenting these developments. The involvement and commitment of former workers in the *Harbour Museum* further indicate a shift in the economic and cultural capital of some protagonists.